

DDI- 02371/84/1

17 APR 1984

MEMORANDUM FOR: Deputy Director of Central Intelligence

VIA: Deputy Director for Intelligence

18 APR 1984

FROM:

Director of Global Issues

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SUBJECT: International Terrorist Threat in the
United States

1. Action: No action required; for your information only.

2. Background: This memorandum responds to your request several months ago for a report on the risk of international terrorism spreading to the Continental United States. In putting this paper together we worked very closely with the Federal Bureau of Investigation. They made a variety of information available to us. Indeed, in many respects the paper is the result of a joint analytic effort. Because of the wide interest in this issue we intend to publish the report as an intelligence assessment as soon as possible. It should be noted that we are undertaking followup work on the risks of the terrorist threat spreading to the United States, especially in association with the Los Angeles Olympics.

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FBI Review Completed

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Central Intelligence Agency

DDI- 08374/841

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Washington, D.C. 20505

DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

April 1984

International Terrorism: Prospects for the Spread of
Violence to the United States in 1984

Summary

The number of terrorist incidents committed in the United States declined last year and remained relatively low during the first quarter of 1984. Given the nature of terrorist groups and individuals willing to undertake terrorist actions, this situation could change quickly and without forewarning. Potential terrorist support networks are in place, and certain groups have the motivation to commit terrorist attacks in the United States--either opposition to US foreign policy or hatred of particular ethnic groups in residence here. Moreover, in our judgment, the United States--because of its open society and sheer size--is vulnerable to terrorist operations. The groups that are most likely to initiate attacks in this country fall into two categories: the state-supporters of terrorism--Iran, Libya, and Cuba--and separatist/irredentist groups--Armenians, Palestinians, and Croats. Events like the Los Angeles Olympics, which could provide a worldwide stage for terrorist violence, offer an opportunity for the level of the threat to increase. [redacted]

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This memorandum was prepared by [redacted] the Instability and Insurgency Center, Office of Global Issues. Research was completed on 13 March 1984. Information about the United States was provided by and coordinated with the Federal Bureau of Investigation. Comments and questions are welcome and should be addressed to the Chief of the Terrorism Analysis Branch [redacted]

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International Terrorism: Prospects for the Spread of
Violence to the United States in 1984

Introduction

This report assesses the threat from foreign terrorist operations in the United States during the remainder of 1984. Our analysis focuses principally on the identification of major organized terrorist groups who by their behavior or statements have indicated a willingness or intention to target the United States abroad. We have specifically excluded from consideration domestic groups and individuals--including those espousing Puerto Rican separation--as these, by statute, are the concern of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and state and local police agencies.¹ [REDACTED]

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Recent US Activities by Foreign Terrorists

According to the FBI, the number of acts of terrorism committed in the United States by foreign terrorist groups has been small over the past several years. In fact, the Bureau reports that domestic terrorist incidents from all sources actually declined in number from 1982 to 1983 in spite of the publicity terrorists earned from the spectacular bombings in

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¹According to data from the FBI, Secret Service [REDACTED] some domestic groups do receive various forms of support from sympathetic communist states, and, in particular, Cuba. There are no indications that such support has increased recently, or that Cuba is directing a terrorism offensive against the United States through these groups. However, other factors--particularly the Los Angeles Olympics--serve to increase the potential for terrorist activity from such domestic groups even without foreign instigation. [REDACTED]

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Beirut. We note, however, that there has never been a correlation between increased terrorism abroad and increased terrorism in the United States. Consequently, we would not necessarily expect to see a rise in terrorist incidents in this country just because terrorism abroad had increased. Moreover, to the extent politically-motivated terrorism has been occurring in the United States, its perpetrators have typically been domestic US groups, like the Puerto Rican separatists, who have linked their actions to Latin American or Caribbean politics. The few terrorist attacks by foreign groups that have occurred in the United States have been limited in scope and aimed largely at the traditional enemies of those groups. [REDACTED]

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We believe this relatively low level of foreign terrorist activity in the United States can be attributed to a range of considerations. In particular, the countries and groups that we regard as potential threats have either suffered organizational setbacks or have more favorable theaters of operation abroad:

- o Although fundamentalist Islamic groups backed by Iran view the United States as their enemy, it has been easier for them to attack US interests in the Middle East, and, to a lesser degree, in Western Europe, than in this country. Iranian activities in the United States over the past few years have been limited to arms procurement, proselytizing, collecting intelligence on opponents of the Khomeini regime, and infighting between pro- and anti-Khomeini groups.

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- o The Palestinian groups in the United States--like their counterparts abroad--continued to be preoccupied with an internal power struggle and serious infighting. They have been watching the situation in the Middle East closely, particularly Arafat's actions, before deciding whether to change their prior tactics and engage in terrorism in the United States. To date, too, the Palestinians in the United States have generally chosen to avoid violence so as not to jeopardize their efforts to establish a political base of support here.
- o Though the two principal Armenian terrorist groups--the leftwing ASALA and the rightwing JCAG--have staged a few attacks against Turkish targets in this country, their major focus continued to be on propaganda activities and fundraising. These groups have traditionally avoided attacks on US interests proper. Both organizations have been relatively quiet over the past few months: ASALA--rent by ideological feuding--has been attempting to reorganize, and JCAG has been preoccupied by ongoing trials of its members in this country and in Yugoslavia. The FBI believes that an eventual return to attacks by those two groups on their traditional enemies--the Turks--is inevitable.
- o Terrorist activity sponsored by Libya in this country has been restricted in the past to attempted

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assassinations of exiles--in at least one case successful. Qadhafi's involvement in a number of African insurgencies over the past two years, as well as in his attempt to obtain the Chairmanship of the Organization for African Unity, probably contributed to his lack of focus on the United States as a target. There is evidence that he has recently begun a campaign against exiles in Western Europe, however, and he may attempt to resume this activity in the United States.

- o Though the Cubans continued to provide some support to Puerto Rican separatist groups, Castro appears to have continued his longstanding policy of not directly sponsoring or initiating anti-American terrorism in the continental United States. Furthermore, we believe Havana remains wary of this administration's willingness--demonstrated in Grenada--to take direct action in the Caribbean in response to any perceived aggression by the Cubans.
- o The Croatians, who in the past have directed attacks against Yugoslavians in the United States, were largely in disarray after suffering serious setbacks to their organization here. Several leading members were arrested in 1981 and convicted of various charges relating to their terrorist activities.

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Other Potential Sources of Trouble

Many terrorist organizations that have attacked US interests abroad apparently pose little threat in the United States proper. The leftist/anarchist European groups like the Red Army Faction fall into this category, along with most of the leftist insurgent groups in Latin America and elsewhere in the Third World that employ terrorism among their tactics. In the past, such groups have rarely operated outside of their traditional environments, and they have not established the support mechanisms in this country needed to facilitate operations here. Furthermore, the anti-US attitudes of these groups that has led them to attack US interests in their own countries has usually been expressed in the context of hatred for alleged US imperialism in their countries. Thus an attempt by such a group to stage an attack in the United States would represent a major departure in both tactics and ideology. [REDACTED]

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A threat of unknown but worrisome proportions involves individuals already resident in the United States--isolated sociopaths, for example, or ad hoc groups of crazies--who might identify with the causes or actions of foreign terrorists and seek on their own initiative to strike a complementary blow here. Spectacular terrorist acts, whether at home or abroad, often trigger copycat behavior in susceptible individuals. Because such people usually operate alone or in extremely small groups, and because their activities are linked only tenuously--if linked at all--to foreign terrorist groups, they are hard to identify before the fact, and their intentions are not discernable [REDACTED]

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Other considerations also help explain the absence of a high incidence of foreign terrorist attacks in the United States in the past several years. We have seen a variety of indications that many foreign terrorist groups--especially those on the Left--have tended to view the United States as a difficult environment in which to operate. These groups may have a perception that US security and intelligence agencies are highly efficient, entry and exit for foreigners not the simple operations they are in most of Western Europe and certain parts of the Middle East, and punishment surer and harsher. Consequently, we suspect that most terrorist groups have concluded that attacks against US interests abroad are the most cost-effective kind of operations. They probably appear easier to carry out, promise less chance of retribution, and offer publicity benefits equal to those of attacks in the United States. [REDACTED]

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Current Indications

Neither we nor the FBI have any information from reliable sources to indicate that any foreign terrorist groups are planning a terrorist offensive in this country this year. Though threats to this effect continue to surface from various sources, most of them have not proven credible. This could change, however. Moreover, a lack of intelligence indicating terrorist plans does not mean that they do not exist. In any event, because the United States is vulnerable to attacks and terrorist groups have in place in the United States potential support networks, the possibility that attacks might occur this year

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cannot be ignored. At least three factors could contribute to this:

- o The occurrence of well publicized, international events, such as the Olympics in Los Angeles, where various groups might be tempted either to air their grievances with the world watching or to use the occasion to embarrass the United States.
- o Any international activity of the United States that was perceived as an immediate threat by certain regimes, especially those of Khomeini and Qadhafi, with the opportunity for violent response abroad limited by the absence of vulnerable, high profile US targets.
- o The occurrence of more spectacular terrorist incidents abroad that might inspire self-styled radicals, especially ones already resident here, to imitate such acts in the United States.

Unfortunately, the latter two sets of circumstances are virtually impossible to anticipate except in the most general sense. The first set, however, the potential problems offered by the Olympic Games this summer, is a far more immediate--and concrete--problem.

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To the extent that any foreign terrorist group or supporting state is a likely candidate to stage or instigate attacks in the

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United States this year, the trouble is most likely to come from one of six directions. All of these are either countries supporting terrorism or terrorist groups espousing separatist/irredentist goals, both of which possess a strong motive--either opposition to US foreign policy or hatred for ethnic groups resident in the United States. All have demonstrated the capability for staging violent terrorist attacks abroad. And all, to a greater or lesser degree, have in place support networks in the United States or Canada composed of individuals with whom they share common ethnic, religious, and political characteristics and who are potentially available as passive supporters if not active co-conspirators or surrogates.

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State-Supporters

Iran. In our judgment, the Iranians currently pose the greatest potential threat in this country. This threat would most likely be manifested in one of two ways: attacks planned and supported by the Iranian government, most likely against the US Government or prominent US citizens, or attacks inspired by Shiite fanaticism associated with events in the Middle East. Although the latter probably would be less sophisticated, security officials also would be less likely to receive prior warning. An additional threat--violence directed against Iranian dissidents in this country--is a major concern:

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- o In November 1983 the FBI discovered that an Iranian students' organization was planning a bombing attack against a theater in Seattle, at which an audience of anti-Khomeini dissidents was expected. Although we do not know whether Tehran had any knowledge of this plot, this incident indicates that exile dissidents in this country--as in others--remain in danger of violence from pro-Khomeini fanatics. [REDACTED]

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However, there are large numbers of Iranians entering this country as students, as well as large populations already in residence here. [REDACTED]

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The largest student group here is the Islamic Society [REDACTED]

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Although we have no indications that this organization is planning terrorist attacks against the United States at this time, it does represent a loose infrastructure that could conceivably be utilized in the future at the direction of the Iranian government. Moreover, similar student

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organizations in other countries have been used in the past to stir up trouble:

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- o In April 1982 members of an Iranian students' organization in West Germany were involved in an attack on anti-Khomeini students at Mainz University.

[redacted] the attack was financed and encouraged by Tehran. [redacted]

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Although we cannot conclude that Iranian student organizations are set up and controlled by Tehran to carry out terrorist attacks or violence against dissidents, there is substantial evidence to indicate that such organizations are potential tools of the regime. [redacted]

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Libya. Although Qadhafi considers the United States his enemy, his current heavy involvement with a number of African insurgent groups and his increasing offensive against Libyan dissidents in Western Europe limit the resources that would be available to launch a major terrorist attack in this country. We believe that, in the immediate future, Qadhafi is more likely to engage in anti-US activities by attacking our interests in the

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Middle East, Africa, or Western Europe, given Libya's current involvement in those areas, and the more accessible targets there.

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[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] We believe Qadhafi is increasing his terrorist campaign in Africa, particularly against those countries that oppose his policy in Chad.

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- o There is substantial evidence that Qadhafi has been laying the groundwork for terrorist operations against Libyan dissidents in Western Europe over the past few months. The recent bombings near the homes and businesses of exiles in London and Manchester were almost certainly carried out by Libyan terrorists. [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED]

Dissidents in this country remain in danger--as they do worldwide--of continuing assassination attempts sponsored by Tripoli. In the past, the Libyan government has directed assassination attempts in the United States (in at least one case successfully) by recruiting assailants from within the country. This tactic is much easier than sending in hit teams, especially since Libya no longer enjoys diplomatic protection in the United States. Moreover, the lack in this country of a Libyan People's

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Bureau--Libya's version of a diplomatic mission, but also a mechanism that the Libyans use to carry out terrorist attacks-- makes it more difficult to carry out a terrorist offensive. [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED]

Qadhafi is, however, reactive to both internal and external events, and should he perceive a direct threat from the United States, he would probably consider an attack in this country.

[REDACTED]

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Cuba. In the past, the Cuban government has provided financial, material, and political support to Puerto Rican separatist/irredentist groups that engaged in terrorism, and probably continues to do so. Havana views this as an essential component of its role in supporting leftwing revolutionary movements in the Western Hemisphere. Nevertheless, we have no information to suggest that Havana has had any direct involvement in instigating terrorist activities in this country--no doubt in part because Castro can exploit the Puerto Rican independence issue and opposition to US foreign policy in Central America via indigenous groups that need little urging to attack the US Government. 2 [REDACTED]

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²The FBI has stated publicly that most terrorist incidents in the United States in 1983 were related to Latin American or Caribbean politics. This includes not only Puerto Rican separatist groups, but anti-Castro groups as well. The latter have in the past successfully engaged in violent attacks against Cuban, Soviet,

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We do not believe that the Cuban government will change its tactics with respect to terrorist activities in this country. Not only do the Cubans already benefit from the independent activities of a number of groups with whom they share common political views, but--in the wake of Grenada--they have become increasingly cautious about the risks of pushing the current administration too far for fear of retaliation.

- o In a speech in November in which he eulogized the Cubans killed in battle in Grenada, Castro took an uncharacteristically defensive line and gave no indications that he would attempt to counter the new US "activism" in the Caribbean. [REDACTED]

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Separatist/Irredentist Groups

Palestinians. The two principal Palestinian organizations in this country, Fatah and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), like their counterparts in the Middle East, are currently preoccupied with infighting.³ According to the FBI, most of the specific threats made by Palestinians in the United States are directed at other Palestinians, some of whom are US citizens. From what we know the threats seem to be

³The Fatah mutiny against Arafat's leadership and policies in the spring of 1983 resulted in a de facto split within the PLO, and many radicals from other PLO groups--for example, the PFLP--have aligned themselves with the rebels. Although the PFLP leadership has publicly declared its support for Arafat, [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] this support is tenuous. [REDACTED]

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directed at individuals who hold particular views regarding intra-PLO politics. Unlike the Iranians, who are willing to target indiscriminately, Palestinian threats tend to be highly focused and not directed at symbolic targets. The lack of indiscriminate threats against US interests here can probably be attributed to Palestinian efforts to build a political base of support in the United States. [REDACTED]

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The US branch of the Fatah organization directly parallels that in the Middle East: a faction loyal to Arafat and a rebel faction. Both segments apparently are watching the Middle East situation closely, and the FBI believes that a terrorist attack in this country is unlikely during this period of confusion and disorganization. This could change as the Middle East situation unfolds and Arafat's position becomes clearer:

- o The Arafat-led PLO as a whole continues to adhere to its decade-long ban on international terrorism [REDACTED]

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According to the FBI, the Fatah organization in the United States does have access to some weapons stocks. The Bureau discovered a cache of remote control devices and detonators in Alexandria, Virginia, over a year ago, and linked it to Fatah.

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The Bureau concluded, however, that this materiel was to be shipped overseas, and not to be used here. It has yet to find caches of weapons that it believes were targeted for use against US targets. [REDACTED]

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Rumors that the PFLP has been planning a terrorist attack in this country have never been substantiated, and the FBI believes that the evidence is too circumstantial to confirm a real threat. Moreover, according to the FBI, the PFLP is principally involved in fundraising activities in the United States, especially the sale of its publications. We do not know whether or not the money is leaving this country. The PFLP apparently also is in close touch with Damascus, but we are not sure whether Damascus has any control over the US branch of this organization. [REDACTED]

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Despite the infighting among groups, some positive interaction still exists between Fatah and the PFLP, mostly through two organizations: the Palestinian Congress of North America (PCNA) and the General Union of Palestinian Students (GUPS). Although these contacts are mostly concerned with financial matters, they could potentially offer a mechanism for coordinating more radical Palestinian activities in this country. We have no indications that such coordination is now occurring or being contemplated. [REDACTED]

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Armenians. The direct threat to non-Turkish targets in the United States from Armenian terrorism remains minimal at this time. The two major Armenian terrorist groups that have been active in the United States--the Marxist Armenian Secret Army for the Liberation of Armenia (ASALA) and the rightwing Justice

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Commandos for the Armenian Genocide (JCAG)--have focused their attacks almost exclusively on their traditional enemy, the Turks. We expect both groups to continue to target Turkish installations and personnel in Western Europe and the Middle East. Although in recent months there has been a lull in activity, we expect this to change. When the change comes it could also impact on the domestic US scene. At this point in time, ASALA's organization in the United States lacks both discipline and leadership, and has suffered badly from fragmentation within its ranks over ideology and the issue of indiscriminate bombings. This same issue has so seriously disrupted ASALA in Western Europe and the Middle East that ASALA has not conducted any terrorist attacks since the group split in August 1983. [REDACTED]

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In our judgment, the Justice Commandos pose a more serious threat to Turkish targets in the United States than does ASALA. The accused slayer of the Turkish Consul General in Los Angeles in 1982 was recently convicted in California. Two JCAG members were sentenced on 9 March 1984 to 20 years in prison for the March 1983 assassination of the Turkish Ambassador to Yugoslavia. Neither we nor the FBI expects any immediate terrorist retaliation for these convictions. JCAG probably will refrain from any terrorist activities at least until the conclusion of another trial involving five key members--which began on 31 January 1984 in California--involving the seizure of a bomb aboard an aircraft at Boston Airport in October 1982. In view of the Armenian community's support for the defendants, JCAG

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is unlikely to commit any attack that may reflect negatively on the possible acquittal of any of these defendants. [REDACTED]

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Croatians. Croatian extremist groups have as their goal the destruction of the Yugoslav state and the establishment of an independent state of Croatia. There are various emigre organizations worldwide, and most of their attacks have been aimed at Yugoslav officials. Croatian terrorists have sought not only to gain publicity for their cause, but also to avenge the murders of Croatian emigre activists believed to have been committed by Yugoslav intelligence:

- o The Yugoslav security services have for years pursued an intensive antiterrorist program that has included diplomatic pressure, propaganda campaigns to discredit Croatian emigre groups, and probably assassinations of key leaders. [REDACTED]

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Those organizations in the United States--the Croatian National Resistance and the Croatian Independence Movement--were effectively weakened in 1981 and 1982 when several members were arrested and convicted of terrorist-related offenses. We concur with the FBI's assessment that these groups do not currently pose a major threat within the United States, although it is not inconceivable that they would attempt to attack Yugoslav targets at the Los Angeles Olympics. [REDACTED]

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The Threat to the Olympics

Although we have no positive intelligence to date indicating

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[redacted]

that any terrorist organization is planning an attack during the Los Angeles Olympics, the opportunity that such an event offers for terrorists to gain worldwide publicity is substantial. Attacks at the Olympics would be most likely to come from state-sponsored terrorists who wished to attack the United States, or certain separatist/irredentist groups whose traditional targets were in Los Angeles for the games. [redacted]

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Because of the enmity with which Iran views the United States and the large concentration of Iranians in southern California (estimated at 200,000), the FBI considers--and we concur--that the greatest potential threat to the Games is Iranian directed or inspired terrorism. Given the size of the potential support network that is already in place, and the availability of weapons and explosives material in the Los Angeles area, Iran would not need to send a "hit team" from the Middle East or Europe, but could rely on assets in the form of Shiite supporters already in place. In view of the potential seriousness of the Iranian threat, security agencies are watching the Iranian community very closely, and we would expect to receive some prior indications that an attack was being planned. [redacted]

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The FBI is also particularly concerned about possible terrorist attacks against Turks by Armenians, who comprise a large community (estimated at 300,000) in southern California. Trouble would most likely come from JCAG, which, unlike ASALA, is well-organized and has tremendous resources in the area--sufficient to plan and stage a terrorist attack. In the past,

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however, JCAG has been careful to target Turkish diplomats, and CIA analysts believe that an attack at the Olympics would signify a radical change in their targeting strategy and would be counterproductive to the group's goal of developing a support base in this country for their grievances against the Turks. [REDACTED]

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In fact, almost any terrorist group with sufficient motivation could probably attempt an attack during the Olympics. It is not difficult to procure weapons and explosives in the United States, and the numerous foreign communities throughout the country and particularly in major metropolitan areas like Los Angeles could certainly provide support networks. Various foreign groups have the motivation and the capability to attempt low-level violence, such as small scale bombing attacks and shootings in the Los Angeles area, and in most cases we would not have much prior warning of such actions. However, given the security and intelligence precautions being taken for the Games, we would expect to receive prior indications if a more sophisticated or large-scale attack were planned by any group. [REDACTED]

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Other Possible Venues

The 1984 World's Fair in New Orleans and the Democratic and Republican conventions in San Francisco and Dallas this summer could conceivably attract terrorist groups--domestic or state-sponsored--who would see an opportunity to both attack the United States and exploit the media. These events would be unlikely to attract separatist/irredentist groups since their traditional

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enemies would not be involved. There are no current indications, however, that any foreign-based group is targeting these events. Moreover, we believe that the Olympics would be a more attractive target for potential terrorist activity because of the worldwide interest and publicity that the Games receive. It is unlikely that a foreign group contemplating a major attack at the Olympics would have the resources to also target one of these events. [REDACTED]

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SUBJECT: International Terrorism: Prospects for the Spread
of Violence to the United State in 1984
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Distribution:

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